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ABSTRACT

The Accelerated Schools Project (ASP) at the University of New Orleans (UNO) was established in spring 1990, funded by a 3-year grant from Chevron. Beginning with 1 pilot school in 1991, the UNO Accelerated Schools Center has expanded to 36 schools representing 19 school districts in Louisiana and 3 schools from the Memphis City Schools district. During the first 5 years of accelerated schools, the primary objective was to develop a multiyear stable funding base and expand systematically "to learn as we would grow." In June 1995, the center staff decided to take stock of these first 5 years and establish priorities to sustain momentum and build toward institutionalization. This paper discusses the taking-stock process and the priorities established by the Center to move closer to institutionalization. The study resulted in three findings. First, the UNO Center should focus its efforts to develop a greater commitment from school districts throughout Louisiana and continue its efforts to work with schools and school districts across the Southern region. Second, the center should prepare coaches to more effectively work with all stakeholders of the school with emphasis on leadership and communications skills, team building, group-process skills, and conflict-resolution techniques. And third, movement toward institutionalization will require that the UNO Center establish a diversified funding base; otherwise, permanency, strategic planning, and staff stability will not be achieved. (JMD)

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Accelerated Schools Centers:

How to Address Challenges to Institutionalization and Growth

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Introduction

The Accelerated Schools Project (ASP) at the University of New Orleans (UNO) was established in the spring of 1990 and funded by a three year grant from Chevron. Beginning with one pilot school in 1991, the UNO Accelerated Schools Center has expanded to 36 schools representing 19 school districts in Louisiana and three schools from the Memphis City Schools district. During the first five years of accelerated schools, the primary objective was to develop a multi-year stable funding base and expand systematically "to learn as we would grow." In June, 1995, the Center staff decided to take stock of these first five years and establish priorities to sustain momentum and build toward institutionalization. The purpose of this paper is to discuss this taking stock process and the priorities established by the Center to move closer to institutionalization.

Taking Stock After Five Years

During the June, 1995, retreat of the UNO Accelerated Schools Satellite Center the staff took stock of the Center's Vision (attached) and addressed the strengths and challenges of each milestone of the Vision. The results of this process identified eight challenge areas which are as follows:

1. Sustainment of the process and momentum for schools after year one.
2. Awareness of the Accelerated Schools Process by the District Office.
3. Additional work on inquiry at the school and teacher level.
4. Professional growth of the Center staff.
5. Academic achievement as measured by standardized tests.
6. Local, statewide and regional networking.
7. Partnership with the UNO College of Education
8. External funding support.

These challenge areas were clustered into the following priorities:

I. Networking (items 2, 6, and 7)

II. Training (items 1, 3, and 5)

III. External Funding (item 8)

IV. Professional Growth (item 4)

Networking

Networking has always been a priority issue for the UNO Center. The historical and political context of Louisiana suggests that successful networking is a critical and necessary component to sustain and to institutionalize the Accelerated Schools Project in Louisiana.

Historically, Louisiana has initiated school change from a top down approach. Legislative mandates and state policy has frequently designed school reform initiatives. School districts in Louisiana generally react by implementing these mandates, seldom, is school change initiated at the school site level. Because of this top-down, controlling culture, networking serves as a support system for these school communities to take risks and build a passion for the Accelerated Schools Project.

Two major components that support the development of accelerated schools networking are statewide meetingsand statewide publications. Five years ago, the UNO Center had eight schools in the project and the first statewide network meeting (consisting of 25 people) was held in one of the network's school's library. Today, the network meetings expanded to small conferences with more than 600 administrators, teachers, and parents in attendance. Statewide meeting themes focus on staff development needs as recommended by a state level cadre. Accelerated schools in the network volunteer to host these semi-annual statewide meetings.

A major component of the statewide network are two statewide publications, the Louisiana Accelerated Newsletter and the Accelerated Schools Accomplishments in Louisiana. These documents are produced to recognize schools and their achievements, to generate interest from potential accelerated schools, and to provide publicity for the funders of the project.

Networking overall was viewed as a strength by the UNO Center staff. However, networking areas of challenge identified were a need for a stronger commitment from school districts which had accelerated schools and a greater awareness of ASP for all school districts in Louisiana. In an effort to improve these areas, the following action plans were developed:

1. The UNO Center would mail to Louisiana school district superintendents, elementary schools and middle schools a copy of the Accelerated Schools Accomplishments Louisiana.

2. The UNO Center would monitor very closely state conferences and meetings and submit request to present at these meetings.

3. UNO mentors would become more aggressive in discussing ASP with members of central office personnel who had schools in the network.

4. The UNO Center would invite central office personnel, particularly Title I directors and superintendents to the spring statewide meeting.

5. UNO mentors would encourage schools to become more active in publishing their successes in local and statewide newspapers.

The results of the early assessment of this action plan appear to be successful as approximately 35 new schools attended the spring, 1996, meeting. Additionally, verbal commitment has been received from 12 of the 15 fourth and fifth year schools to continue in the network at their own expense for the 1996-1997 school year.

The UNO Center has made efforts to develop their network potential across southern states by providing regional assistance. After collaboration and support from the National Center for Accelerated Schools, in August, 1995, it negotiated with the Memphis City School district to launch three pilot accelerated schools in Memphis through the coaching model. The Memphis accelerated schools would also become active participants in the Louisiana Accelerated Network by attending statewide meetings and visiting accelerated schools throughout Louisiana. The UNO Center is currently providing assistance to a Cleveland, Mississippi school system which is exploring the launching of an accelerated school.

A final challenge under networking was to create a stronger partnership with the UNO College of Education, particularly in the area of teacher education. No action plan was designed to address this issue; however, this topic remains as one of high importance toward institutionalization of the UNO Accelerated Schools Center.

Training

The second major priority resulting from taking stock was training. Training challenges primarily addressed coaching training issues, training for schools engaged in ASP for four years and beyond, and the role of the UNO Center after the initial training.

Coaches Training A coaches' retreat was held in June, 1995, to receive feedback on the challenges for first year coaches. The coaches identified four challenge themes: 1) principal, 2) support staff and teachers, 3) staff, students, parents, and the community, and 4) district and other demands. The following table provides a listing that describes characteristics of these challenging areas:

Challenges for First Year Coaches

Principal	Support Staff and Teachers	Students, Parents and Community	District and other Demands
Need for increased awareness	Methods to involve all members of the staff	Students, parents and community participation on cadres	Support from the superintendent and school board members
Step back to let the process work	Ways to sustain involvement	Communication between the school and stakeholders	Support central office personnel
Keeping the principal informed	Paraprofessional limited work day	Sustained involvement	Lack of communication
Lack of attendance at training and school site meetings	Scheduling meetings	Avoid acting on assumptions	Early results
Lack of overall participation	Meeting management procedures	Involving parents in the process	Clarification of the process
Motivating the principal to make changes			

The coaches also suggested strategies to improve these challenges and recommended that these strategies become incorporated into the guidelines and training for future coaches. The following table summarized these recommendation:

Recommended Strategies for First Year Coaches

Principal	Support Staff and Teachers	Students, Parents and Community	District and other Demands
Early buy-in from principals	Attendance at statewide meetings	Improve dissemination of information	Involve the superintendent and school board members in all events
Training in ASP	Appropriate schedule of meetings	Constant communication	Be specific when approaching the superintendent and school board members
Help principal use empowerment	Review meeting management techniques	Parent coordinator	Encourage attendance of parents, staff, and students at school board meetings
More effective communication with coaches	Conflict resolution techniques	Acknowledge efforts of those involved	Have a plan of action ready that requires assistance from the central office person to whom you are speaking
	Encourage ASP as a way of life		
	Off campus meetings		

The first year coaches also suggested behaviors for the role of the accelerated coach in year two. These behaviors were as follows:

- Provide on-going support with ASP and school needs
- Responsible for keeping the process active in the school
- Keep the principles and philosophy alive
- Launch other schools in the district
- Assement of progress in the school
- Leadership
- Know the school and understand the culture
- Believers (keepers of the dream)

Training for Schools After Three Years

On February 6, 1996, the UNO Center held a meeting with principals of fourth and fifth year accelerated schools to primarily address staff development needs of schools after three years in the process. Specifically, the four objectives of the meeting were as follows:

1. Identify staff development needs and ASP technical assistance needs of Louisiana Accelerated Schools after three years.

2. Determine the role of the UNO Accelerated Schools Center in providing services to schools to satisfy the staff development and technical assistance of Objective #1.

3. A) Identify funding sources that are available to help schools and the UNO Accelerated Schools Center find monies to support staff development and technical assistance needs, and B) Determine the methods of securing these funding sources.

4. Develop an action plan to achieve the three objectives of this meeting.

The results of the feedback addressing these four objectives are summarized in the following table:

The Role of the UNO Center and Needs of Schools After Three Years

Staff Development and Technical Assistance Needs	**Role of the UNO Center**	**Funding Sources**
Accelerated School Process Revitalization, inquiry, vision, powerful learning, evaluation, training of coaches in all schools, buy-in by students. *Professional Needs* Classroom management, test-taking skills, grade level teachers working together. *Parental Involvement*	*Technical Assistance and Site Visits* Periodic assistance or as needed. *Training* New teachers and administrators *UNO Library of Information* Videos of activities and training of schools in the network and nationally, videos of speakers at statewide meetings, and information of activities from other Centers. *Staff Development on Powerful Learning and Improvement on Standardized Tests* *Statewide and Regional Meetings*	*BESE 8(g) Grants* *Title I Funding* *Local and Regional Foundations* *Business Partners* *Competitive Grants*

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This information provided by the fourth and fifth year principals was reviewed and became the basis for developing a five part action plan. Highlights of the action plans are as follows:

1. Inform districts of first and second generation schools that they will need to secure funds to continue membership in the network for the 1996-1997 school year.

2. UNO staff schedule a workshop on grant writing for all schools in the network interested in attending.

3. Plan and schedule a Block Grant writing workshop to be presented by the State Department of Education to all schools in the network.

4. Secure deadline dates for grants and school-wide Title I budget revisions.

5. In order to continue active membership in the network, schools no longer under the BESE grant have to pay for services. It was the recommendation of the group as a whole to develop two plans from which to choose. The cost based on services provided will be $1500 or $4500.

All aspects of the action plan have been executed. School superintendents of fourth and fifth year schools have been requested to support the continued involvement of their accelerated school in the Louisiana network. A grant writing workshop, sponsored by the UNO Center and the staff of the Louisiana State Board of Elementary and Secondary Education has been scheduled. Finally, two technical assistance options (attached) have been designed to meet the range of costs and staff development needs of the schools.

External Funding

After the initial three year funding by Chevron, USA, the UNO Center has been funded primarily by the Louisiana State Board of Elementary and Secondary Education. In the past six years, this State Board has allocated approximately $1.6 million from an education trust fund to the Louisiana Accelerated Schools Project. However, due to a shortfall in this education trust fund, the State Board has decreased its support to the UNO Center. This situation has prompted the Center staff to aggressively seek external funding to sustain the operation of the Center, and

to launch new accelerated schools.

The UNO Center staff developed a three part action plan to address the challenge of increased external funding. First, a staff member has participated in a grant writing workshop. This staff person will play an important role in writing grants for the UNO Center and providing technical assistance to network schools in grant writing. Secondly, a plan has been implemented to encourage schools who are engaged in schoolwide Title I to use the Accelerated Schools Process. Thirdly, UNO Center would request funding from local and regional foundations to support the coaches training for new schools to be conducted in the summer of 1997.

Staff Development of UNO Accelerated Schools Center

The fourth priority area of the taking stock process focused staff development of Center personnel. The UNO Center staff agreed that meeting this challenge was an essential need to expand the services of the center. Also, it was needed to provide more effective assistance to schools in developing strategies and methods of powerful learning, ultimately leading to increases in academic achievement. A two part action plan was initiated to meet this objective. First, the staff received a two day training session in multiple intelligences techniques. The session was done in the spirit of powerful learning to enable the UNO ASP staff to develop skills, and an understanding of multiple intelligences to effectively train accelerated schools communities. The training was conducted by a UNO professor who specializes in teaching all children as gifted. Secondly, it was agreed that the UNO staff that make every effort to attend national conferences that were held in New Orleans. Annually, the city of New Orleans hosts major education meetings such as Association of Supervision and Curriculum Development, International Reading Association, American Educational Research Association, National Association of Elementary School Principals, American Association of School Administrators and National Middles School Association and other educational professional meetings. Attending these meetings would be a cost-effective way to remain current in professional growth.

Conclusions and Recommendations

The taking stock process after five years established priorities and a road map to sustain

momentum and build toward institutionalization for the UNO Accelerated Schools Center. This inquiry activity suggested the UNO Center focus its efforts to develop a greater commitment from school districts throughout Louisiana and continue its efforts to look toward working with schools and school districts across the Southern region.

The UNO Center should prepare coaches to more effectively work with all stakeholders of the school, principals, teachers, school board members, support staff and the business community. Emphasis on leadership and communications skills, team building, group process skills and conflict resolution techniques should be integrated into the development of accelerated school coaches. Fourth and fifth year schools have a range of staff development needs. The UNO staff should broaden its technical assistance skills by engaging in a structured staff development program to meet the comprehensive needs of these schools.

Finally, movement toward institutionalization will require that the UNO Center establish a diversified funding base. Permanency, strategic planning, and staff stability, will not be achieved without a multiple source, multiple year, funding base. Federal and state funds and local school district contracts, can sustain the operation of the UNO Center on a short term basis.

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